

Date: February 8, 2026 (Epiphany 5)

1. Texts: Isaiah 58:1-9a; Ps. 112:1-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12; Matthew 5:13-20.
2. Subject: faith.
3. Topic: genuine faith includes the obligation to live out God's moral demands.
4. Aim: challenge.
5. Proposition: "God calls us to be the gospel in words and actions that reflect his truth, righteousness, justice and compassion."

GOD DOES MAKE DEMANDS

Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near
to God.

"Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves,
but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on
your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast
only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on
high... Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of
injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go
free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with
the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself
from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the
dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your
vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be
your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will
answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.¹

What courage God demanded from the prophet Isaiah! Isaiah was told to confront the people with their moral failings. The people thought that fulfilling their religious duty was enough to satisfy God. They thought that worship in the temple would earn them God's attention and blessing.

¹ Isaiah 58:2-4, 6-8a, 9.

But God made it absolutely clear: observing the rituals and traditions was not good enough by any means. It was through their moral and ethical words and actions that God would hear them. Their lives were to reflect his truth, righteousness, justice and compassion. Worship in the temple was empty, meaningless and without impact unless it was supported by their moral lives, attitudes and actions. This proclamation is what God demanded of Isaiah.

In an age where Christian nationalism is on the rise, this message takes on urgency and power. Isaiah's message is far more significant, important and demanding now than it was twenty years ago.

Saying you're a Christian does not make you one. Worshipping in a congregation frequently and regularly does not earn you God's attention and blessing. Christian faith must be demonstrated and acted upon. Christian faith must reflect the nature and identity of Jesus Christ. The hallmarks of a genuine relationship with God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit are God's truth, righteousness, justice and compassion. Such qualities must be seen and experienced through our words and actions.

We are to defend the widow and orphan. We are to clothe the houseless and feed the hungry. We are to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour by setting the captive free and protecting the oppressed. Such are the actions of genuine faith.

This reminds us of the prophet Micah:

[The LORD] has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?²

God does not require correct forms of worship or theologically correct prayers. He's looking for justice, kindness and humility in service. It is through our lives, our lifestyles, our actions and our public proclamations that we will demonstrate our salvation and God's love.

This may prove difficult, as difficult as it may have been for Isaiah to preach.

² Micah 6:8.

Our lives, lifestyles, actions and proclamation may have to challenge the moral assumptions of others. Our discipleship may irritate our neighbours. We may have to act in defense of others, protesting their ill treatment and oppression. As Jesus himself proved, living God's righteous life can be costly.

This is where the Church comes in—including its worship and rituals.

God does not expect that you will have to confront immorality and injustice on your own. You will not have to be a lone soldier in the battle against oppression and persecution. Your Christian faith is not lived out in isolation.

God has provided you with a support system. This system stretches back more than 2000 years. It includes Isaiah, Micah, Jesus, Peter and uncounted millions who have lived the life of God before you. It includes this diocese and this congregation. It includes the person sitting closest to you in this nave.

We access this support system first through our worship. Through our music, prayers, sacraments and sermons we tap into the eternal realities of God. We consistently invite the Holy Spirit to enrich our spiritual lives and provide direction for our ministries. Our worship connects us to the strength and love of God himself.

This miracle occurs in community. Worship is always a communal experience. We are joined to one another in faith and so in the practice of our lives, our lifestyles, our actions and our public proclamations. We are not alone, and there is strength in numbers.

This sermon started out with wonder at the courage God demanded from Isaiah. But, by now, you've surely realized that God is making the same demand of us all. Today, perhaps, we can commit ourselves to being God's proclamation in the world. Today, we can be Jesus' hands, feet, eyes and voice in our world.

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

AMEN.